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AUTHOR	Smigielski, Alan
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ABSTRACT

The three lesson plans in this issue feature the Eskimos of the Bering Sea and their culture. The lesson plans are: (1) "Learning about a Culture from Its Objects"; (2) "Learning about a Culture from a Story"; and (3) "Everyday Objects." Each lesson cites student objectives; lists materials needed; gives subjects (social studies and language arts); and suggests a step-by-step classroom procedure. It includes colorful illustrations and informative materials about the Eskimos in the lessons which add to the learning process for students. Contains a resource list of 10 books and teaching guides and 3 Web sites. (BT)

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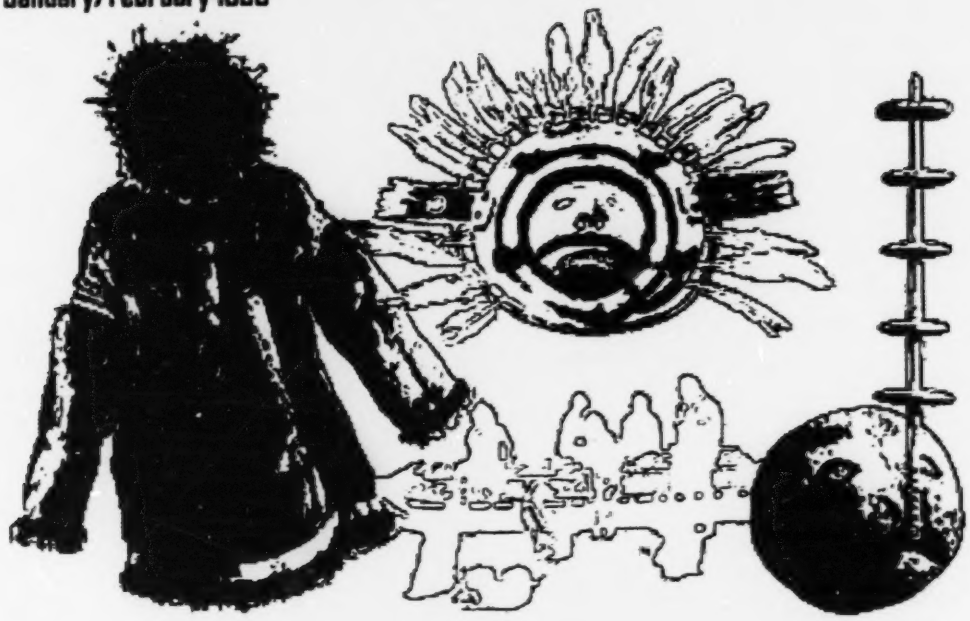

TEACHING FROM OBJECTS AND STORIES

Learning about the Bering Sea Eskimo People

SUBJECTS
- Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Georgraphy

Grades 3-8

Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies

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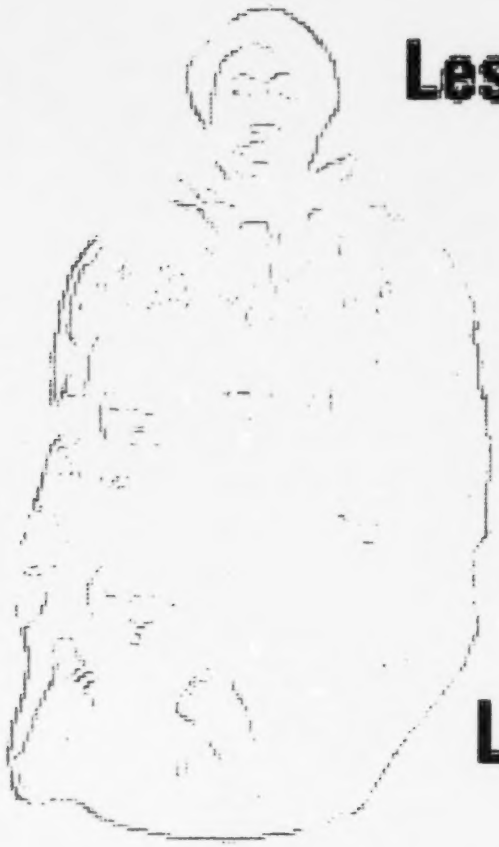

Lesson 1

Lesson 2

Lesson 3

Resources

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Writer
Alan Smigielski

Translator
Sarita Rodriguez

Web Design
Alan Smigielski

Publications Director
Michelle Knovic Smith

LESSON 1

Learning about a Culture from Objects

Objectives

- Identify materials used in several traditional cultural objects.
- Interpret possible functions of several traditional cultural objects.

Materials

- Copies of Activity Page 1A.
- Copies of Activity Page 1B.
- Paper.
- Pens or pencils.
- Chalkboard, chalk.

Subject

Social studies, language arts

Procedure

1. Begin a class discussion by asking your students to think about the work of a detective? what does a detective look for? Answers will vary, but students should conclude that a detective seeks evidence (clues) that might help to solve a mystery. Tell your students that they'll be acting much like detectives in the next few lessons. The mystery they'll be unraveling is that of a traditional culture, very different from their own. Stress that although you'll provide the clues, they'll have to solve the mystery on their own.

2. Divide your class into four or five groups of equal size. Give each group copies of Activity pages 1A and 1B. Direct your students to Activity Page 1A. Ask them to carefully observe each object photograph. What does the object appear to be? What is it made from? How might it have been used? What does the object tell us about the people who made it or the environment in which they lived? Have your students write their observations either on the Activity Page or a separate sheet of paper. Repeat the above procedure for each object photograph on Activity Page 1B.

3. After your students have observed and interpreted all the object photographs, designate a spokesperson for each group. For each object photograph, direct the spokespeople to explain his/her group's interpretation and briefly note it on the

chalkboard. (*Some objects may be more difficult for students to interpret than others, especially if your school is in a moderate climate region.*) Generally, students will identify that a sled, a coat, a boat, and socks are among the objects. Interpretations may vary, but students should conclude that people of this culture lived in a cold and wet climate, dwelled on or near the coast, were skilled craftspeople and artists, and depended upon many different resources (e.g. wood, animals, grass). (*Be sure to use the Teacher Answer Key to confirm the identity of the objects and to evaluate student observations.*

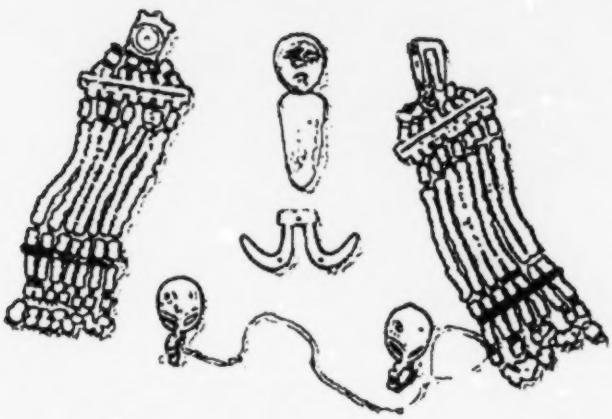
4. Conclude the activity by telling your students that in the next lesson they'll read a story that was very important to these people. Stress that the story will contain a few more important clues!

ACTIVITY
PAGE 1A

Everyday Objects

ACTIVITY
PAGE 1B

Everyday Objects



Teacher Answer Key

Fur Parka
The straight lower cut of this outer garment identifies it as a man's parka. (Women's parkas, in contrast, were curved at the bottom.) Parkas were often made of squirrel, mink, muskrat, or summer reindeer skins.

Kayak
This watertight and highly maneuverable vessel was ideally suited to hunting sea mammals in icy waters. The kayak shown here is made of seal skins sewn over a wooden frame and featured an enlarged cockpit with room for a passenger.

Sled Model
Nineteenth-century Smithsonian researcher Edward W. Nelson obtained this wooden sled model on one of his many collecting trips. At full scale, such sleds were between nine and ten feet long and were pulled by a team of seven dogs.

Earrings and Labrets
Both men and women wore highly decorative body ornaments. Adornments shown here include glass bead earrings that were hung from pierced earlobes and carved ivory labrets that were inserted into the skin at the corners of the mouth.

Grass Socks
These hand-woven grass socks were worn to absorb moisture that seeped into enclosing skin boots.

Fish Hooks
These elegant fish hooks are crafted from polished stone and fossil ivory. Fish was an important staple in the diet of Bering Sea Eskimo people.

LESSON 2

Learning about a Culture from a Story

Objectives

- Identify environmental influences on a traditional culture.
- Identify animals and plants important to a traditional culture.
- Interpret the identity of a traditional culture from objects and a creation story.

Materials

- Copies of the Raven Myth.
- Copies of the Traditional Eskimo Life essay.
- Paper.
- Pens or pencils.
- Maps of the United States (*you might also use the atlas section of your social studies book.*)

Subjects

Social studies, geography, language arts

Procedure

1. Tell your students that they'll now be reading the Raven Myth, a creation story that was very special to the people they've been studying. Stress that all cultures have stories to explain the Earth's creation. Creation stories address some of the fundamental questions of human existence. Who made the sun, the moon, and the stars? Where did people come from? How did the animals, the birds, the fish, and the plants begin? Emphasize that although the word "myth" can sometimes mean something untrue, a creation myth is not a whimsical story. Be sure to stress that while the Raven Myth does not include a modern scientific explanation of how the world began, it expresses the deepest and truest values, fears, hopes, and beliefs of the traditional culture your students are studying.

2. Divide your class into four or five groups of equal size. Give each group copies of the Raven Myth. Choose several student volunteers to alternately read the story aloud. Emphasize that the Raven Myth is most authentic when spoken aloud, since the people who created it had no written language. Ask your student readers to carefully enunciate the Raven Myth and request that the rest of the class listen closely. Appoint a spokesperson for each group and ask the spokesperson to note the natural environment described in the Raven Myth, including the animals, birds, fish, and plants.

3. When your students have finished reading the Raven Myth, begin a class discussion. What was the environment like? (Cold and wet, located near the sea with nearby rivers and mountain streams.)What animals and fish were described? (Raven, mountain sheep, tame reindeer, caribou, sticklebacks, graylings, blackfish, salmon, beaver, muskrat, deer, bear.) What plants could Man eat? (Salmonberries and heathberries.) What hunting advice did Raven give to Man? (Caribou were plentiful; beavers were difficult to catch; muskrat skins made good clothing; graylings were found in clear mountain streams; sticklebacks lived along the seacoast.) Which animal was the most dangerous to people? (Bears.)

4. Tell your students that because they've gathered many clues from this story and the objects in Lesson Plan 1, they're ready to solve the mystery. Who do they think these people were? In what region of the world might they have lived? Ask your students to think of all the animals, plants, and objects they have identified. Hint that people of this traditional culture lived in what is now the northernmost part of the United States and the forty-ninth state to join the Union. (*This may be a difficult exercise for younger students unfamiliar with U.S. geography or history.*) Students should conclude that the traditional culture they have been studying was located in Alaska. Direct your students to maps of the region and tell them that they have been studying the traditional culture of the Bering Sea Eskimo people during the nineteenth century.

5. Give each group copies of the Traditional Eskimo Life essay. Choose several student volunteers to alternately read the story aloud. Tell your students to listen closely. After the story has been read, begin a class discussion. What information in the essay did they already know from studying the objects and story? What information in the essay was new to them?

6. Conclude the activity by telling your students that contemporary Bering Sea Eskimo culture is a rich blend of tradition and change. Hunters now use high-powered rifles, snowmobiles, and boats with outboard motors. Once-isolated villages are now linked by television and radio. Most children attend school regularly and study by the glow of electric lights during the long, dark, Arctic winters.

It was in the time when there were no people on the earth. For four days the man lay coiled up in a pea-pod. On the fifth day he stretched out his feet burst the pod, falling to the ground, where he stood up, a full-grown man. looked about him, and then moved his hands and arms, his neck and legs, examined himself curiously.

After a while he had an unpleasant feeling in his stomach, and he stooped down to take some water into his mouth from a small pool. The water ran down into his stomach and he felt better. When he looked up again he saw approaching, with a waving motion, a dark object which came on until just in front of him, when it stopped, and, standing on the ground, looked at him. This was a raven, and, as soon as it stopped, it raised one of its wings, pushed up its beak, like a mask, to the top of its head, and stared at the man, and after it was raised he stared more than ever, moving about from side to side to obtain a better view At last he said: "What are you? From where did you come? I have never seen anything like you." Then Raven looked at Man, and was still more surprised to find this strange new being was so much like himself in shape.

Then Raven told Man to walk away a few steps, and in astonishment exclaimed again: "From where did you come? I have never seen anything like you before." To this Man replied: "I came from the pea-pod." And he pointed to the plant from which he came. "Ah!" exclaimed Raven, "I made that vine, but did not know that anything like you would ever come from it. Now wait for me here." Then he drew down the mask over his face, changing again into a bird, and flew far up into the sky where he disappeared.

Man waited where he had been left until the fourth day, when Raven returned, bringing four berries in his claws. Pushing up his mask, Raven became a man again and held out two salmonberries and two heathberries, saying, "Here is what I have made for you to eat. I also wish them to be plentiful over the earth. Now eat them." Man took the berries and placed them in his mouth one after the other and they satisfied his hunger, which had made him feel uncomfortable.

Raven then led Man to a small creek nearby and left him while he went to

the water's edge and molded a couple of pieces of clay into the form of a pair of mountain sheep, which he held in his hand, and when they became dry he called Man to show him what he had done. Man thought they were very pretty, and Raven told him to close his eyes. As soon as Man's eyes were closed Raven drew down his mask and waved his wings four times over the images, when they became endowed with life and bounded away as full-grown mountain sheep.

Then Raven made two animals of clay which he endowed with life as before, but as they were dry only in spots when they were given life, they remained brown and white, and so originated the tame reindeer with mottled coat. In the same way a pair of caribou were made and permitted to get dry and white only on their bellies, then they were given life; in consequence, to this day the belly of the caribou is the only white part about it. Raven told Man that these animals would be very common, and people would kill many of them.

"You will be very lonely by yourself," said Raven "I will make you a companion." He then went to a spot some distance from where he had made the animals, and looking now and then at Man, made an image very much like him. Then he fastened a lot of fine water grass on the back of the head for hair, and after the image had dried in his hands, he waived his wings over it as before and a beautiful young woman arose and stood beside Man. "There," cried Raven "is a companion for you," and he led them back to a small hill nearby.

In those days there were no mountains far or near, and the sun never ceased shining brightly; no rain ever fell and no winds blew. When they came to the hill Raven showed the pair how to make a bed in the dry moss, and they slept there very warmly; Raven drew down his mask and slept nearby in the form of a bird. Waking before the others, Raven went back to the creek and made a pair each of sticklebacks, graylings, and blackfish. When these were swimming about in the water, he called Man to see them. When the latter looked at them and saw the sticklebacks swim up the stream with a wriggling motion he was so surprised that he raised his hand suddenly and the fish darted away. Raven then showed him the graylings and told him that they would be found in clear mountain streams, while the sticklebacks would live along the seacoast and that both would be good for food.

In this way Raven continued for several days making birds, fishes, and animals, showing them to Man, and explaining their uses. After this he flew away to the sky and was gone four days, after which he returned, bringing back a salmon for the use of Man.

Looking about Raven saw that the ponds and lakes were silent and lonely, so he created many water insects upon their surfaces, and from the same clay he made the beaver and the muskrat to frequent their borders. Man was shown the muskrat and told to take its skin for clothing. He was also told

that the beavers would live along the streams and build strong houses and that he must follow their example, and likewise that the beavers would be very cunning and only good hunters would be able to take them.

At this time the woman gave birth to a child, and Raven directed Man how to feed and care for it, telling him that it would grow into a man like himself. As soon as the child was born, Raven and Man took it to a creek, rubbed it over with clay, and then returned with it to his stopping place on the small hill. The next morning the child was running about pulling up grass and other plants which Raven had caused to grow nearby; on the third day the child became a full-grown man.

After this Raven thought that if he did not create something to make men afraid they would destroy everything he had made to inhabit the earth. Then he went to a creek nearby, where he formed a bear and gave it life, jumping to one side quickly as the bear stood up and looked fiercely about. Man was then called and told that the bear would be very fierce and would tear him to pieces if he disturbed it.

Then he made different kinds of seals, and their names and habits were explained to Man. Raven also taught Man to make rawhide lines from sealskin, and snares for deer, but cautioned him to wait until the deer were abundant before he snared any of them.

Then Raven found that three other men had fallen from the pea-pod that gave the first one. These men, like the first, were looking about them in wonder, and Raven led them away in an opposite direction from that in which he had taken the first man, afterward bringing them to firm land close to the sea. Here they stopped, and Raven remained with them a long time, teaching them how to live. He taught then how to make a fire-making device (a bow drill) from a piece of dry wood and a cord, taking the wood from the bushes and small trees he had caused to grow in hollows and sheltered places on the hillside. He made for each of the men a wife, and also made many plants and birds such as frequent the seacoast, but fewer kinds than he had made in the land where the first man lived. He taught the men to make bows and arrows, spears, nets, and all the implements of the chase and how to use them; also how to capture the seals which had now become plentiful in the sea.

After Raven had taught the men how to make kayaks, he showed them how to build houses of drift logs and bushes covered with earth.

Looking about Raven thought the earth seemed bare; so, while the others slept, he caused birch, spruce, and cottonwood trees to spring up in low places, and then awoke the people, who were much pleased at seeing the trees. After this they were taught how to make fire with the bow drill and to place the spark of tinder in a bunch of dry grass and wave it about until it blazed, then to place dry wood upon it. They were shown how to roast fish

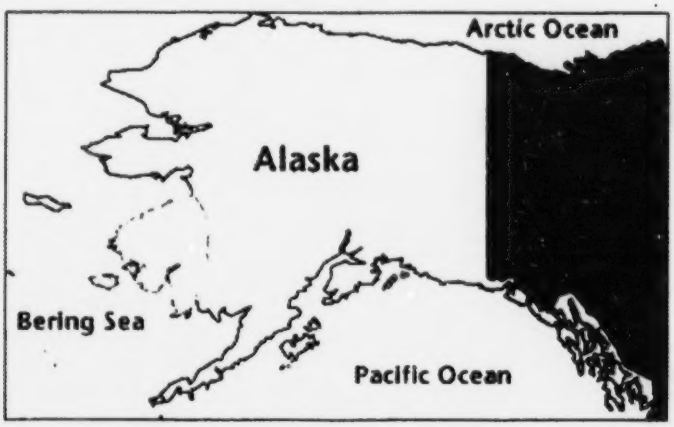
on a stick, to make fish traps of splints and willow bark, to dry salmon for winter use, and to make houses.

One day Man went out seal hunting along the seashore. He saw many seals, but in each case after he had crept carefully up they would tumble into the water before he could get to them until only one was left on the rocks; Man crept up to it more carefully than before, but it also escaped. Then he stood up and he seemed full of strange feeling, and the water began to run in drops from his eyes and down his face. He put up his hand and caught some of the drops to look at them and found that they were really water; then, without any wish on his part, loud cries began to break from him and the tears ran down his face as he went home. When his son saw him coming, he called to his wife and mother to see Man coming along making such a strange noise; when he reached them they were still more surprised to see water running down his face. After he told them the story of his disappointment they were all stricken with the same strange ailment and began to wail with him, and in this way people first learned how to cry.

Where the first man lived there had now grown a large village, for the people did everything as Raven directed them.

Abridged version of the Raven Creation Myth from William W. Nelson's translation.

TRADITIONAL ESKIMO LIFE



Map of Alaska with Bering sea region highlighted.

Bering Sea Environment: Climate and Seasons

Unlike the more rugged Arctic lands farther north, most of the area around the Bering Sea is flat open tundra, where grass, moss, and shrubs grow. Swamps, mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests also occur in some places within this vast area.

For six months of the year, the climate is wintry and harsh, marked by fierce snowstorms, high winds, and sub-zero temperatures. From early November until the end of April, ice and snow cover the ground. In the deep cold of winter the days are so short that the sun barely makes an appearance.

Spring arrives full force in May. A rainbow of wildflowers, rye grass, and berries carpets the tundra during the lengthening days. On land, caribou (a kind of deer) graze on the tender young plants. At sea, walruses, seals, and many other animals thrive. In the lakes and rivers, fish teem and ducks and geese abound.

Spring and summer pass quickly, and by October snow begins to fall again. Land animals, such as the fox, grow white coats so as to blend in with the winter landscape. In the ocean, seals make breathing holes in the ever-thickening ice. By November, the icy grip of winter returns to the land of the Bering Sea.

TRADITIONAL ESKIMO LIFE

Nineteenth-century Eskimo village.

Traditional Village Life

In the late nineteenth century the land around the Bering Sea supported more than seven thousand Eskimo people living in permanent villages. These people developed an ingenious hunting technology and an elaborate religious and ceremonial life. The village described in this essay was located near the mouth of the Yukon River and numbered about 125 inhabitants.

The houses of this village were very different from the houses of ice built by Eskimo peoples farther north. Here each house was rectangular in shape and sturdily built from driftwood logs covered with sod.

Villagers built every house to be cozy and warm. A long passageway led from the outside door to the living area several feet below ground level. Sleeping ledges covered with soft furs adorned the walls. Light and heat came from a central fireplace and from saucer-shaped clay lamps placed on the sleeping ledges.

Several families related through marriage shared each house. Married couples had their own sleeping ledge, and each woman had her own lamp. Sometimes only the women and children slept in the houses, especially during winter festivals when the men and older boys slept in the **qasgiq** (*khuzz'-a-gick*), or men's council house.

During the summer months, groups of two or three families each moved to inland camps. Throughout the mild summer days, women and younger children searched for berries, roots, grasses, and leaves while men and older boys hunted and fished.

TRADITIONAL ESKIMO LIFE

An Eskimo hunter readies his harpoon during a summer hunt.

Hunting on Land and Sea

The men of the village had to be expert hunters because their families' survival depended upon their skills. The hunters used the animals they killed in many ways: the flesh and blubber, for food; the bones, antlers, and ivory, for tools; the skin and sinew, for clothing, boat covers, and blankets. They wasted no part of an animal.

Two sea mammals, the seal and the walrus, were important sources of meat, skin, oil, ivory, and bones. Eskimo hunters perfected a variety of techniques to hunt these and other animals through the changing seasons. They hunted walruses from boats and captured muskrat, mink, caribou, and deer in traps and snares. In winter, they harpooned seals as they surfaced for air at their breathing holes. In spring they clubbed seals as they sunned on the open expanses of ice.

Bering Sea Eskimo hunters used a swift, lightweight boat, or **kayak**, to pursue birds, fish, and other game over the lakes and open seas. Made to hold one or two persons, the kayak had a frame of wood or bone with a tight-fitting skin cover. The hunter climbed into a small opening in the top of the kayak and sat with his legs inside the boat and his parka tied around the opening. In this snug position, he could paddle swiftly without fear of ice-cold water entering his boat.

Eskimo hunters had enormous respect for their quarry. They believed that every living thing possessed a spirit or **inua**. According to Eskimo tradition, an animal's inua was humanlike in form and continued to live after the animal was killed. If an animal's inua was pleased by hunters, it would become the spirit of a newborn animal,

thus ensuring plentiful game on Earth.

A hunter, therefore, had to be skillful not only with his weapons but also with his knowledge of the spirit world. He had to know how to control and please the spirits. Often hunters created exquisitely carved weapons in the shape of an animal's natural predators. These weapons were made of materials familiar and comforting to the intended prey. By depicting the predator, a hunter hoped to gain the speed and cunning of that animal in his own pursuit.

The hunter also needed an understanding of the spirit world for the ceremonial dances of winter. On these important occasions, he might wear a richly symbolic inua mask. A inua mask often portrayed an animal with its inua shown as a small, semihuman face surrounded by hoops that symbolized the heavens. Bering Sea Eskimos believed that through these masks and ceremonial dances the spiritual, animal, and human worlds became fused, ensuring successful future hunts.

TRADITIONAL ESKIMO LIFE

Eskimo women made a wide assortment of clothing, such as the winter garments pictured above.

Women at Work

Like their hunter husbands, Eskimo women performed work that was essential to their families' survival. They prepared food, made clothing and blankets, cared for the children, and kept the home lamps burning.

Preparing animal skins occupied much of a woman's time. First, she skinned the animal with a half-moon-shaped knife, or ulu. Then, using a sharp stone scraper set in an ivory handle, she might work all day softening and cleaning a single skin. Occasionally, if a skin needed further softening the woman soaked, bleached, stretched, or even chewed it.

Once prepared, skins served a variety of purposes. Eskimos made caribou skins into blankets, rugs, and clothing and fashioned the skins and intestines of sea mammals into floats, waterproof garments, tents, boats, and sled covers.

Just as the men had to be good hunters, Eskimo women needed to be expert seamstresses and weavers. Without warm and watertight clothing, their families could easily freeze to death in the harsh Arctic environment.

Eskimo women made a wide assortment of handmade clothing. For the summer season, they made an ensemble of pants and a shirt of lightweight and warm animal skin. They added a caribou skin shirt with hooded parka and a second layer of pants for the winter season. In all seasons, women made skin boots, grass socks, and fur mittens. Every Eskimo man, woman, and child wore these same basic outfits, with only slight variations in style and decoration.

TRADITIONAL ESKIMO LIFE

Children playing in the Eskimo village of Rasboinsky.

Children Learning through Play

As soon as an Eskimo child started to walk, he or she was given a wide assortment of toys: balls made of caribou skin, small bows and arrows, dolls of skin and fur, and spinning tops of wood. A child learned though play and from listening to and watching adults.

Boys accompanied their fathers on hunting trips from an early age. On these trips, they mastered many of the skills they had been practicing in play with their friends in the village such as spearing fish, harpooning seals, and trapping small land animals. They also learned the habits of the animals and how to find their way around on tundra, sea, and lake, even in blinding snow. When a boy killed an important animal, he was taken to the men's house, or qasgiq, where the kill was announced to everyone assembled. It was cause for proud celebration when a boy killed his first large animal (usually a seal). He was now considered a man, eligible to sleep with the other men in the qasgiq during the festival season and to marry and start his own family.

Girls remained at home and learned all they could from their mothers. When an Eskimo girl was still quite small, she was given a miniature lamp just like the larger one that belonged to her mother. Girls also practiced housekeeping with tiny wooden bowls, grass mats, needles, and small skin work bags. Communities noted certain milestones in a girl's life with celebrations: the first time she picked berries, wove a basket, and danced in the qasgiq.

LESSON 3

Everyday Objects

Objectives

- Describe the pioneering work of researcher Edward W. Nelson.
- Identify everyday objects that aid in understanding a culture.

Materials

- Copies the Take-Home Page.
- Pens or pencils.

Subjects

Social studies, language arts

Procedure

1. Tell your students that most of what we know today about traditional Bering Sea Eskimo life is due to the work of one man. Explain that in the late nineteenth century (1878-81) Smithsonian Institution researcher Edward W. Nelson journeyed to the largely unexplored Bering Sea region of Alaska. There Nelson found a culture virtually unknown to the outside world, and he vigorously set out to document it. He traveled more than five thousand miles by foot, dogsled, and kayak and amassed a vast collection of artifacts, observations, and photographs. Among the Eskimo people Nelson was known as "the man who buys good-for-nothing things," because of his zeal for collecting everyday objects.

2. Explain that these same everyday objects are the clues that your students examined in Lesson Plan Step 1 and the evidence that researchers rely upon today when studying traditional Bering Sea Eskimo culture. Stress that what may appear everyday and ordinary to us might well help someone from another culture or time to understand us better.

3. Give each student a copy of the Take-Home Page. Tell your students to imagine that they are researchers on a mission to study and document a previously unknown culture. The culture can be either a group of students at school, their family, or a community group. Stress that students must collect objects that will help others to understand the culture they are studying. (*Be sure to mention that students need*

not collect excessively large objects! A few small objects will suffice for this activity.)

4. After your students have completed their research, begin a class discussion on their results. What objects did they collect? Why? How would these objects help someone from another culture or time to understand the culture they have studied? Answers may vary, but students should conclude that these ordinary objects are significant because they reveal a great deal about the everyday lives of the people who use them.

TAKE-HOME PAGE
TRABAJO PARA HACER EN LA CASA

Imagine you are a researcher like Edward W. Nelson on a mission to study a previously unknown culture. (Your culture can be either a group of friends at school, your family, or a community group). What objects would you collect to help others to understand this culture? Why did you choose these objects? *Remember, you'll need to bring these objects to school, so don't choose anything that's too heavy or too large!*

Imagina ques eres un investigador como Edward W. Nelson y que tu misión es estudiar una cultura desconicida. (Esta cultura puede ser un grupo de amigos de tu escuela, tu familia o un grupo en tu communidad.) Qué objetos coleccionarías para que otros puedan comprender mejor esta cultura? Por qué escojiste estos objetos? *Recuerda que tendrás que traer estos objetos a la escuela, no escojas algo muy pesado o muy grande.*

The culture I studied was

Object **Objeto**	**Why Chosen** **Por qué lo escojiste?**

RESOURCES

BOOKS AND TEACHING GUIDES

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ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Information on current Arctic research at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History can be found at the Arctic Studies Center [http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/]. The

site includes *Crossroads of Continents*, a fascinating virtual museum exhibition that explores North Pacific cultures from the end of the last Ice Age to the modern day.

Arctic Circle [http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/] provides coverage of contemporary issues in the circumpolar Arctic. Included at the site are links to environmental, cultural, and historic resources.

Teachers and others interested in information about Native peoples of Alaska should visit the Alaska Native Knowledge Network [http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/]. The site also contains a searchable database of culturally-based curriculum resources.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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